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Role of university in relationship building between individual and community

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Abstract

The relationship is one of interdependency with direct influence from both sides. At the same time, the role of the elements of these “golden triangles” – named this way by Hinzen H. in the paper “Standards and Demandings in Adult Education” (coord. Șoitu, 2006) – will be modified, and each of them will become a priority eventually. This study will show the used and useful paths in the building process of individual and of communities.

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From the beginning, we have to understand that individuals have many roles to accomplish along the entire life cycle, and for this reason, they need to adjust to the society’s new requests. One of the challenges in the present – given the new trends in politics, economy, education and social fields – is that citizens must prove they are prepared for the questions of another world, a world with different expectations. For this new world, we also need more innovation in knowledge.

By linking academic needs and resources to the community needs and resources, universities can foster relevant, mutually beneficial engagement initiatives that demonstrate a shared responsibility of social and civic engagement for our students, our university, and our community. As we were stating earlier, the individual is continually adjusting and, at the same time, university has the role of supporting individuals adjust to the community. In a re-

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thinking of the university's roles, one of them will suggest a permanent re-adjustment by correcting, improving or eliminating those offered in order to observe the individual's benefits in relation to the community and to other factors.

Modern universities can fulfil their responsibility to society only if they provide enough resources to research and teaching at all levels and for all mixed groups within society. Therefore, universities have to keep alive the interest for individual development, to provide a suitable answer for different needs and to accept new perspectives for improvement, and not only for creating a heterogeneous environment. In addition, we refer to university not as distinct, isolated education, but to the whole sector of tertiary education, including the college level and the forms of postgraduate education.

In his paper, Professor Hinzen referred to many golden triangles in adult education, such as Competitiveness – Employability – Mobility; Policy – Legislation – Financing; Public – Company – Individual; Participants – Programs – Providers and Government – NGOs – Universities. Those triangles have a high influence in the relationship studied by us: university – community – individual; they can facilitate or block it.

1. University's needs and roles

In 2010, the President of the International Association of Universities reiterated the importance of the role of the university in addressing major global issues like: community-university partnership as a valuable work for the students; the future of universities in a time of uncertainty and decreasing resources etc (Northmore & Hart, 2011). What has become clear is that none of these major issues on the global agenda will be resolved without the participation of universities, since they are the environments that foster not only knowledge, thought and research but also proposals for social action (De la Fuente, 2010). In addition, universities can offer more stability than many other organisations within a given community.

The role of universities has evolved over the past 20 years. Where once largely focused on teaching and research within a universal community of knowledge creating institutions, universities are adopting a third role in regional economic development. This role is recursive, re-shaping the two traditional roles undertaken by universities, and transformative, re-positioning universities as primary institutional spheres in economic regulation, alongside industry and the state (Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff, 1997 *apud* Gunasekara, 2006).

Academic education is designed to form elite groups that can and would refresh the community which they belong to, bringing innovation not only through knowledge showing applicative judgement, but also through cultural experiences (academic education gather various cultural personalities) and teamwork experience (academic education use many methods based on teamwork spirit for performing tasks). By conveying this perspective to a group field, the approach will be different, causing maybe questions and uncertainties but, once cleared, the new perspective will be slowly adopted. Where are the university's needs? Well, it must be recognized for this effort, for transferring contents and outlooks to an individual and to strongly believe that he will manage to deliver these to his belonging group or community. University still plays a twofold role: on one hand, it adapts by adjusting and, on the other, it adapts the individual by adjusting itself. The training for this twofold influence is performed by school, on all levels, but mainly by the University. University can place the individual beyond his own interests and those of the belonging community by understanding, explaining and assuming the change, through integration, in time or through the geographic location. Universities need to be recognized by the local government, to encourage this practice. Once this need is covered, the relationship chain will not easily break.

Here, we can mention one of the "golden triangles": Public – Company – Individual, designed by H. Hinzen. This triangle can have different forms: starting with Individual would be more suitable in this point of the paper. The list of individual needs is far from exhaustive and there are various fields promoting the centrality of their distinctive need systems. These include, for instance, the need to belong, to bond or connect with others; the need for meaningfulness as put by Richard Nixon (in Picren & Rutherford, 2010), "Unless a person has a reason to live for other than himself, he will die – first mentally, then emotionally, then physically", so we should think deeper where these needs are fulfilled. Can academic experience promise a full accomplishment? Yes, only if the needs of individual and university can meet at one point. Lists of roles and needs are not separate lists; both can be located in the same equation of interdependence. This relationship is explained by positive sciences, by behavioural sciences (see the theory of Bronfenbrenner, 1951; *Psychology of Crowds* of Gustave le Bon, 1895), by social and earth

sciences. However, what is the role of universities in bringing wider changes in society? But for the individual? Are individual changes quite important to make a difference at a society level? This is the question sought to address to universities roles if the society is found through them. It is to be addressed primarily in respect of a limited number of societies in which recent social changes had widely been regarded as transformative.

The universities are important educational and social institutions supported by the society of which they are a part. They have a twofold role in the 21st century: they must, to an extent, stand apart from society and be keepers of universal values and critics of their own society, while they at the same time must contribute, from their independent scholarly and scientific perspective, to the social, scientific, technological, economic, political and cultural development of individuals and society.

Universities' roles rank between macro and micro level, elite and mass education, components and the whole:

- Important role in the societal change
- Encourage and facilitate the emergence of new cultural values
- Role in modern society
- Distinction between elite education and higher education for the masses
- Maintenance and development of the national identity for the real development of community
- Reconstruction of the human personality inside and not uniformly, but multiple, guaranteeing specific aspects

Higher education means social-forming components necessary for people to live together with others and help prosperity group.

Internationally, higher education institutions incorporate civic engagement and community service into their research and teaching in a wide variety of ways. Universities need to more actively demonstrate the added value they bring when addressing complex social problems in partnership with local communities (Mulvihill et al., 2011).

2. Individual needs vs. community needs

Community is one of the central concepts in the social sciences, yet it frequently lacks a precise definition. In a review of the community literature many years ago, Hillery (1955) found more than 94 separate definitions. The term *community* also has been used interchangeably with neighbourhood.

Following Wilkinson (1991), we define *community* as including three elements: (1) territory or place, (2) social organizations or institutions that provide regular interaction among residents, and (3) social interaction on matters concerning a common interest. We do not exclude communities of interest, such as professional organizations or religious groups. Nowadays, people become less attached to specific places and increasingly linked to communities of interest.

Many problems arise between the needs and desires of the individual and the larger society. In order to find a balance between the needs of society and the needs of individuals, it is necessary to determine what those needs are, and how they affect both sides. The needs of society can be found by determining how a society would function if in its ideal form. Ideal societies would be completely successful at having their needs fulfilled, so these needs and their effects would be much more obvious than in an unsuccessful society, where negative factors would complicate the view of its operation. While benefits to society are often benefits to individuals, the fact that the needs of the two are not identical means that there is the possibility of conflict between them. Individual comes as a necessity in a society when he provides what it is needed at the right moment. To cope with rapid movements of the societies it is required many specific competencies according to the new challenges, and all of them build those "transforming societies" (Brennan, King & Lebeau, 2004). These kinds of groups do not have a secure perspective; although there are many ways of information and technologies development, a third characteristic emerges: the uncertainty of future. The future enables us to have a diversity of modern information.

Societies should be able to valorise all individuals' experience for both leadership and feedback. Valorising them does not mean turning them into an advantage of overworking individuals, but exploring their capacities, their innovative spirit in order to see what each of them can bring to mutual benefit. This can build a strong community. Society does not exist independently of individual human beings. As Ludwig von Mises (1963) noted, "The individual lives and acts within society. But society is nothing but the combination of individuals for cooperative

effort.” Indeed, he continues, „The fundamental facts that brought about society are the facts that work performed under the division of labour is more productive than isolated work and man’s reason is capable of recognizing this truth.” In other words, society exists to serve individuals, not the other way around. If communities need individuals to exist, what individuals need to form communities?

Some of elements can be constituted by:

- Education for change and uncertainty
- The need for intellectual work
- Social recognition and involvement in partnership with the community.

It may be true that every single experience – borrowed by existing ones in the community – can help the development of common values; hence, it becomes important to develop yourself through the other, and to understand that one day it will be your turn. Common values, individual values, how can we mediate them, in order to not affect any of them? Is education enough? We may need something more. Just as Durkheim (1973, p. 5) divided individuals into two parts, the body and the soul, we can analyze his notion of society in a similar manner. Individuals constitute the body of society, that which is personal. The soul of society can be described through its social facts and institutions, its components that are not materially based, but that extend their power over the whole. In this respect, social facts are sacred and impersonal because they are distant from the individual, yet they still influence our everyday lives. Furthermore, while individuals depend on the coexistence of the body and soul, society does so in the same manner. Where we can find the community soul? University – through the roles mentioned above – becomes a force for the community that we cannot reach but we can feel its influence long time after. Universities are, beyond all, the soul of a community, giving liveliness to creation, changes and values.

Throughout most of their histories, universities have entered into intimate relationships with other social institutions, sometimes supportive, other times critical. In the modern world, calls for universities to adapt and re-adapt and to respond to the changing character and needs of other social and economic institutions are frequently heard.

3. Conclusions

Communities train processes in which individuals improve their skills and develop capabilities to organize local communities, perform different functions, solve community issues and problems, set and achieve objective. Linking community and individuals is not a separate contact, so other organizations and systems are involved. Important institutions in the community, with high recognition, can cover such involvement. Universities provide several strategies to improve skills of individuals and they offer ways for adaptation and change of the individual to community. The individual is capable of constructing a better society, of improving when he is in contact with university; he becomes a change agent.

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